



Part of RHS **BRITAIN IN BLOOM**



Heart of England in Bloom Newsletter September 2020

Greetings

I hope everyone is well. After the lovely weather of early Spring and Summer, we are now dodging some heavy showers and staking up plants blown down by the wind. It's great to see news of Heart of England groups on Twitter. Some of the photos are stunning. Well done everyone for keeping going. Send me your news!

Carol
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Leominster in Bloom - a good idea

Members of Leominster in Bloom have been working hard all summer. The planters are flourishing, the streets are clear of weeds and litter, the street furniture soon to be painted - but no judges.

So we have decided to ask the town to vote. Here you see the ladies from Lloyd's Bank waiting to vote. Voting involves a great many people and gives them reason to think about their town and environment. The results will be announced at our Plant Fair on 19 September.
Rosemary Worthington



Once Upon a Time...

.... In the middle of Ten Acre Field on Scatterbrook Farm there lived a scarecrow. And his name was Worzel Gummidge. And I loved him! His body was a home for nesting birds, insects and pupating butterflies. He was a harbinger of the changing seasons and, like me, he often talked out of turn and found himself in trouble! But his adventures always seem to end with "a nice cup of tea and a slice of cake". So where is this taking us? To Ross on Wye, that's where, and specifically to the Ross Community Gardens to carry out an H of E In Bloom Assessment.

Met at the gate by Tim Shelly, we entered the gardens to be greeted by a phalanx, a veritable terracotta army, of Worzel Gummidge. How wonderful was that?

Now, if only scarecrows could talk, (and who says that they can't?), this is what they would say:

" We are all here as guardians of these many raised beds. We have been made by each of the gardeners to identify their plots and to give people a sense of ownership and responsibility. So there!"

An hour later, after an excellent tour of the garden and meeting up with lots of 'human beans' we were offered "a nice cup of tea and a slice of cake". And I raised my cup to memories of childhood and all those Worzels gathered there today.

Guardians of the gardens indeed
Lesley Pritchard



Our Chair, Roger Tait, has sent in this piece about Newcastle-under-Lyme

For many years, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, along with many other councils from across the country, entered the local authority flower bed competition at the RHS Tatton Park Show each July.

It was great fun, and an opportunity to showcase some of the quirky and unique aspects of our Borough through planting and temporary installations – the BBC always did a short piece on this aspect of the show as part of their coverage and we used to enjoy seeing our efforts televised, as well as looking out for good ideas from the other entrants – I seem to remember Birmingham and Bournemouth were always ones to watch!

We got into the routine of bringing our installations back home with us after the show finished and setting them up on one of the roundabouts on the ring road around Newcastle town centre so local people could enjoy the sight of unusual things like a spitfire (Reginald Mitchell was from the Borough), a kangaroo pushing a coal truck (Joseph Cook, former prime minister of Australia was the son of a miner from Silverdale) and a clown (the modern circus was invented by Philip Astley of Newcastle).

We also wanted to spin out the benefits to our sponsors, local businesses who contributed to the cost of entering Tatton, and this was a good way of extending the life of their investment and maximising the publicity they could gain from supporting the initiative.

Sadly, interest in the flower bed competition began to wane and by 2014, there was only a handful of entrants left. We decided, along with our loyal sponsors, that we could perhaps achieve something more sustainable and of greater benefit to our local community by creating some permanent installations in Newcastle, which would enhance our sense of place, and provide a unique identity for the town.

Working with our partners, Aspire Housing, and our sponsors, we met with an internationally renowned artist, Andy Edwards (the Beatles at the Cavern Club, the Truce in Ypres) who happens to be a local lad and we discussed ideas for a theme. We came up with Flora and Fauna that can be found in and around Newcastle which fitted perfectly with our Bloom campaign and other initiatives to promote wildlife and biodiversity across the Borough. Andy came up with some concept designs of various plants, mammals, birds, insects and reptiles which were locally prevalent and we identified the roundabouts around the ring road and gateway sites as the perfect locations for the installations.



It also gave us the opportunity to re-landscape the roundabouts to create settings for the pieces and to move away from traditional, costly and high maintenance annual bedding on these areas, and to experiment with herbaceous perennials.

An added benefit was that our partners Aspire Housing, run a social enterprise called PM Training, which takes on young people and trains them in areas such as engineering, joinery, painting and decorating and horticulture. Our artist, Andy, worked with the engineering trainees to fabricate the sculptures from the models he had made, and the Council's apprentices worked with the PM Training horticulture trainees to plant out the roundabouts based on designs provided by our Landscape Architects.

It really did turn into a team effort, with huge benefits for training and skills as well as promoting the messages of Bloom and biodiversity. In terms of funding, PM Training provided the labour as their contribution, local businesses provided cash contributions and in-kind donations as sponsorship packages and other funds were found from Section 106 agreements relating to developments in the town centre. There was also an 'invest to save' element in transferring from annual bedding to perennials – the saving from taking out the annual bedding was reinvested into the one-off cost of buying the perennials in year one, and then became a year-on-year saving thereafter.

The average cost of one of our schemes is around £25,000, including the sculptures, which represents great value for money when the additional benefits are factored in.

The first one was completed in 2015 – a brown trout which is linked to the Borough coat of arms and a project where trout were re-established in the Lyme Brook after a scheme to improve water quality and habitat in partnership with Groundwork and the Environment Agency.

This was followed by a buzzard in 2016, a honey bee on a dandelion in 2017, a hare in 2018, and snowdrops in 2019 – the photos show them in situ surrounded by the accompanying new landscaping and perennial planting.





For 2020, we have obviously been delayed by the pandemic, but our latest addition to the family is now being fabricated and we hope to have it installed in late autumn, restrictions permitting. Any guesses as to what it could be? We'll keep you guessing for the time being and reveal it later in the year! If anyone is interested in finding out more, please feel free to contact me, or my colleagues at landscape@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk

